

Key NSC figure ready to testify before Senate committee

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Howard J. Teicher, a National Security Council aide who declined to appear before a House committee last week, is "ready to cooperate" with a Senate panel this week, sources told The Washington Times.

"When he testifies, he is ready to cooperate with the committee," said one source close to Mr. Teicher. "He's going to say what he knows."

Intelligence Committee Chairman David Durenberger said Mr. Teicher will testify today or tomorrow.

Testimony from Mr. Teicher, who on advice of counsel refused to appear last week before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, would come at a time when congressional investigations of the Iran-Contra affair have been stymied by the refusal of key officials to testify.

There is speculation that Mr. Teicher will deny he had any role in the diversion of up to \$30 million in Iran arms proceeds to the Nicaraguan resistance.

Mr. Teicher's testimony could link more closely former National Security Adviser Vice Adm. John Poindexter and former NSC aide Lt. Col.

Oliver North in the alleged scheme to arrange Contra funding. It could also raise questions about how much White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan knew about the affair.

These results could follow because Mr. Teicher, who currently heads the NSC's office of political and military affairs, stood between Adm. Poindexter and Col. North in the National Security Council chain of command. He served directly under Adm. Poindexter and was Col. North's superior.

Both Adm. Poindexter and Col. North have repeatedly invoked their Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination in declining to testify before Congress.

Adm. Poindexter resigned and Col. North was fired on Nov. 25, the same day that Attorney General Edwin Meese announced Col. North directed the Contra funds diversion. At the time, Mr. Meese said Adm. Poindexter knew of funds going to the Contras but was not aware of the details.

Mr. Teicher's willingness to talk apparently indicates he was cut out

of the information loop regarding Contra funding and that Col. North answered directly to Adm. Poindexter.

"If Teicher, Lt. Col. North's immediate superior, was not in on the Contra skim-off, this indicates to me that North wasn't just going off as a cowboy, but had a very clearly defined relationship direct to Poindexter," one observer said.

Mr. Teicher's testimony, should it link Adm. Poindexter directly to the Contra skim-off, also would raise anew the question of Mr. Regan's involvement since Adm. Poindexter reported directly to the White House chief of staff.

Mr. Reagan has said he was not aware of the Contra funds diversion until he was told of the scheme by Mr. Meese in late November.

Mr. Regan's repeated clashes with National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane led to Mr. McFarlane's resignation in December 1985.

Mr. Regan subsequently boasted of his "hands-on" relationship with the

NSC, and observers believe that a key factor in Adm. Poindexter's appointment was that he was seen as someone who would not "make waves", but would be directly responsive to the chief of staff.

In early 1985, Mr. Teicher authored a proposal, with some input from Col. North, recommending that the government loosen Opera-

tion Staunch, which was designed to prevent other countries from shipping arms to Iran.

CIA analyst Graham Fuller came up with a similar finding in May 1985. He argued that the Soviet Union was working in Tehran with an eye on influencing the post-Khomeini government there.

Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger dismissed Mr. Teicher's proposal when it reached his desk, scribbling the word "absurd" across it.

"Teicher was obviously on the plane [to Iran] because he wrote that paper," one observer said. "If he sees no need to take the Fifth on that, I would assume Poindexter and North could have too. This makes you wonder what they did need to take the Fifth on."

In 1981, Mr. Teicher supported a decision by then-Secretary of State Alexander Haig to go along with a

plan by then-Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon to transfer U.S. arms to Iran. Gen. Haig reversed himself after other department officials protested.

Michael Ledeen, then a consultant to Gen. Haig, and Mr. McFarlane, who was then counselor to the State Department, have both been reported as supporting the action. In recent testimony, Mr. McFarlane reportedly said he did not remember the action. Last year Mr. Ledeen, then acting as an NSC consultant, played a major role in arranging contacts between Iranian arms dealer Manucher Ghorbanifar and Mr. McFarlane.

By 1985, a time when official U.S. aid to the Contras was cut off by Congress, a secret system was in place to funnel private aid to the rebels. Col. North allegedly played a

role in setting up the private supply network.

"Col. North is not a regional specialist, he's an operator," one expert said. "The machinery to channel weapons to Nicaragua could also serve to ship them to Iran."

In April and May 1985, Mr. Ledeen was in touch with Iranian officials and Israeli officials including David Kimche, director-general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry; arms dealer Yaakov Nimrodi, former head of Israeli intelligence in Iran; and Mr. Ghorbanifar.

Israeli sources said that Mr. Nimrodi and Mr. Ghorbanifar had discussed a deal in which Israel supplied U.S.-made arms to Iran and Iran responded by helping to get U.S. hostages in Lebanon released.

Mr. Kimche went on to meet Mr. McFarlane, who took the proposed contacts plan to President Reagan. The president was then in hospital recovering from cancer surgery.

In August 1985, Israel sent a small plane load of Soviet-made arms, captured from the Palestine Liberation Organization in southern Lebanon, to Iran. The arms were intended for the regular Iranian army, but they were seized at Tehran's Mehrabad Airport by a contingent of Iran's Revolutionary Guards.